

Subject: Implications of High Altitude Nuclear Tests
by Communist China

1. Available information on Chinese missile and nuclear programs indicates that the Chinese may now have a capability to conduct high altitude nuclear tests. If not, they will have this capability within the next year or two.

2. This form of nuclear testing would enable the Chinese to develop and verify improved warhead designs for strategic attack missiles and for strategic defensive missiles such as antiaircraft and antiballistic missile weapons, and to gain knowledge about the "blackout" effects of nuclear explosions on radar and radio communications. The Chinese could use knowledge of "blackout" effects to increase the effectiveness of surprise attacks against other countries.

3. Analysis of data from their high altitude nuclear tests would give us information on the design of warheads then being tested and an indication of how Peking intends to employ its nuclear weapons.

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5. We have no specific evidence concerning when the Chinese might conduct high-altitude nuclear tests. It is doubtful that we should receive any specific evidence in advance of such a test.